



US009105787B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Guha et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,105,787 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Aug. 11, 2015**

(54) **TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCING
EFFICIENCY OF PHOTOVOLTAIC DEVICES
USING HIGH-ASPECT-RATIO
NANOSTRUCTURES**

(71) Applicant: **International Business Machines
Corporation**, Armonk, NY (US)

(72) Inventors: **Supratik Guha**, Chappaqua, NY (US);
Oki Gunawan, Fair Lawn, NJ (US)

(73) Assignee: **International Business Machines
Corporation**, Armonk, NY (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 59 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **14/020,253**

(22) Filed: **Sep. 6, 2013**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2014/0007931 A1 Jan. 9, 2014

Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 12/039,953, filed on Feb.
29, 2008, now Pat. No. 8,551,558.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
H01L 31/0232 (2014.01)
H01L 31/07 (2012.01)
H01L 31/0224 (2006.01)

(Continued)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **H01L 31/07** (2013.01); **H01L 31/0256**
(2013.01); **H01L 31/02327** (2013.01); **H01L**
31/022425 (2013.01);
(Continued)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H01L 31/022425; H01L 31/03529;
H01L 31/07

See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,163,677 A * 8/1979 Carlson et al. 136/255
7,709,288 B2 5/2010 Goto

(Continued)

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

AU 2006297870 B2 4/2007
EP 1892769 A2 2/2008

(Continued)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Kayes et al., Comparison of the Device Physics Principles of Planar
and Radial p-n Junction Nanorod Solar Cells, 97 J. Appl. Phys.
114302 (May 2005).

(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Allison Bourke

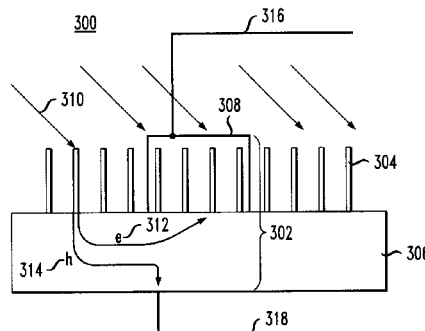
Assistant Examiner — Edward Schmiedel

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Vazken Alexanian; Michael
J. Chang, LLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Photovoltaic devices and techniques for enhancing efficiency
thereof are provided. In one aspect, a photovoltaic device is
provided. The photovoltaic device comprises a photocell hav-
ing a photoactive layer and a non-photoactive layer adjacent
to the photoactive layer so as to form a heterojunction
between the photoactive layer and the non-photoactive layer;
and a plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures on one or
more surfaces of the photoactive layer. The plurality of high-
aspect-ratio nanostructures are configured to act as a scatter-
ing media for incident light. The plurality of high-aspect-ratio
nanostructures can also be configured to create an optical
resonance effect in the incident light.

13 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



Page 2

(51)	Int. Cl. H01L 31/0352 (2006.01) H01L 31/18 (2006.01) H01L 31/0256 (2006.01)	2008/0006319 A1 1/2008 Bettge et al. 2008/0017240 A1 1/2008 Goto 2008/0169017 A1 7/2008 Korevaar et al. 2008/0251122 A1 10/2008 Ready 2011/0165724 A1 7/2011 Guha et al. 2011/0309382 A1* 12/2011 Lowgren 257/88
(52)	U.S. Cl. CPC H01L 31/03529 (2013.01); H01L 31/18 (2013.01); Y02E 10/50 (2013.01)	
		FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS
(56)	References Cited U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS	JP 2006261666 A 9/2006 JP 2007324324 A 12/2007 JP 2008028118 A 2/2008 WO WO2008005327 A2 1/2008
	8,669,125 B2* 3/2014 Lowgren 438/22 2002/0172820 A1 11/2002 Majumdar et al. 2004/0021062 A1 2/2004 Zaidi 2005/0009224 A1 1/2005 Yang et al. 2005/0214967 A1 9/2005 Scher et al. 2006/0207647 A1 9/2006 Tsakalagos et al. 2006/0260673 A1 11/2006 Takeyama 2007/0012353 A1* 1/2007 Fischer et al. 136/251 2007/0012354 A1 1/2007 Kobayashi et al. 2007/0092648 A1 4/2007 Duren et al.	OTHER PUBLICATIONS Guha et al. "Selective area metalorganic molecular-beam epitaxy of GaN and the growth of luminescent microcolumns on Si/SiO ₂ ," Appl. Phys. Lett. 75, 463 (Jul. 1999). English Machine Translation of Yoshizumi et al. (JP2007-324324, Dec. 2007).
		* cited by examiner

FIG. 1A

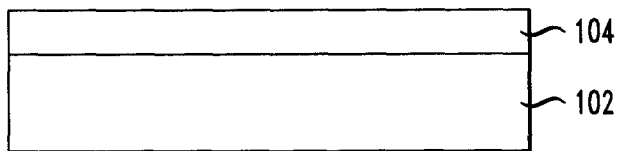


FIG. 1B

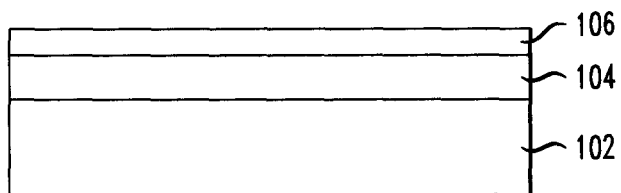


FIG. 1C

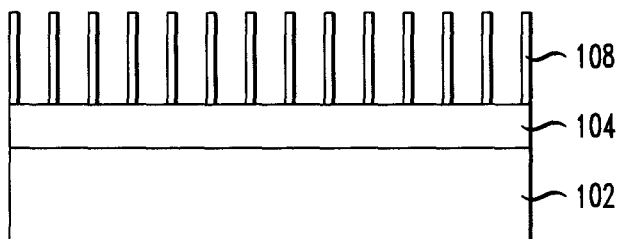


FIG. 1D

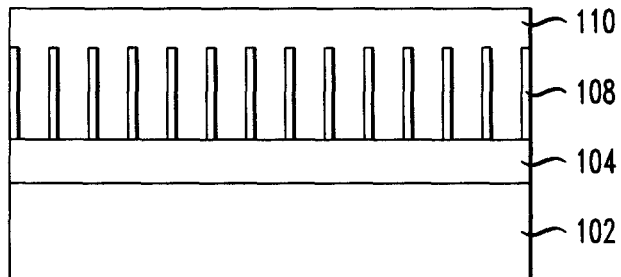


FIG. 2

200

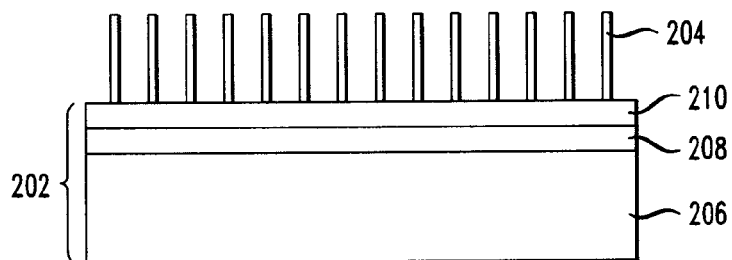


FIG. 3

300

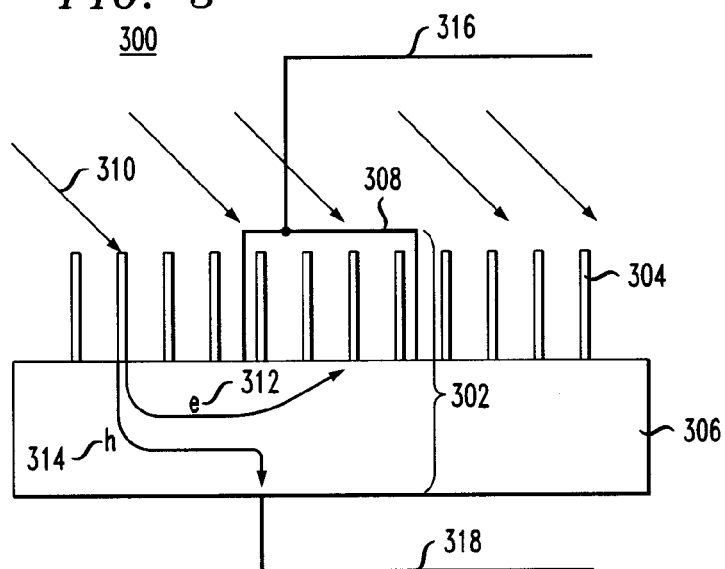


FIG. 4

400

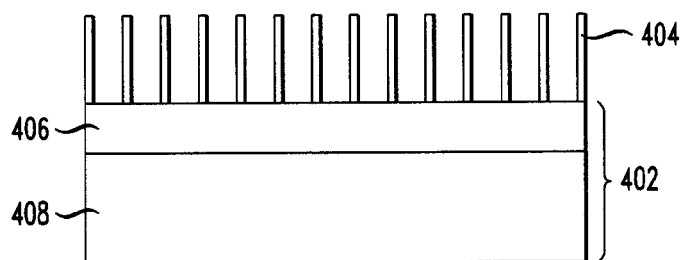


FIG. 5

500

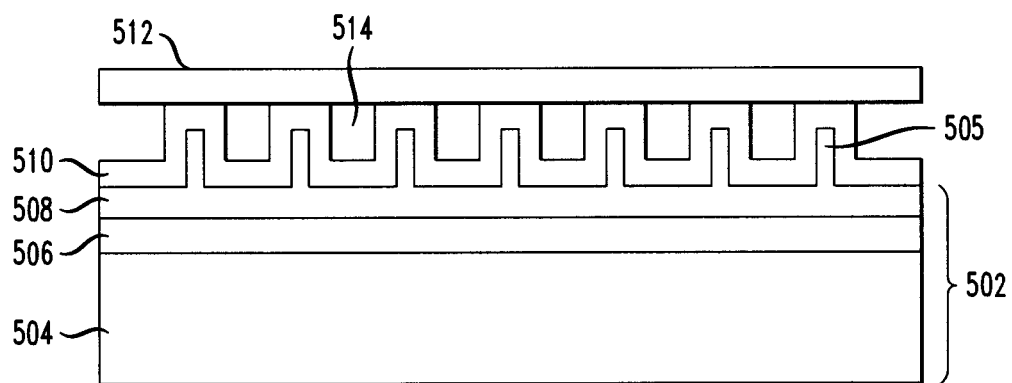
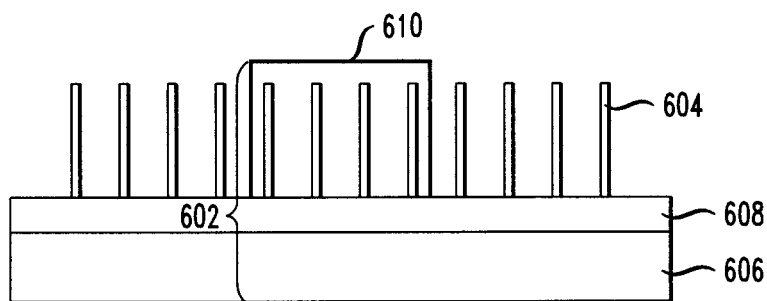
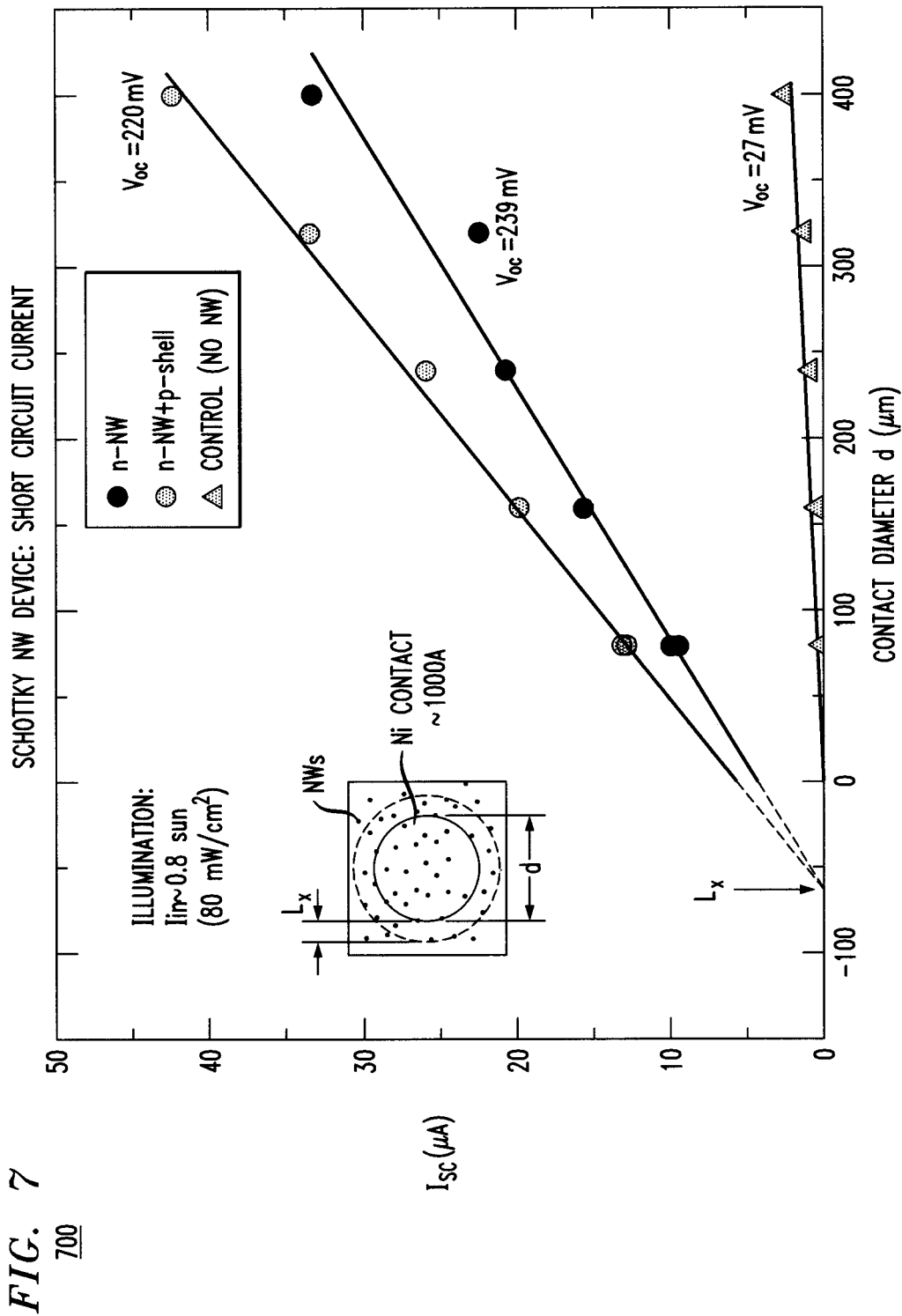


FIG. 6

600





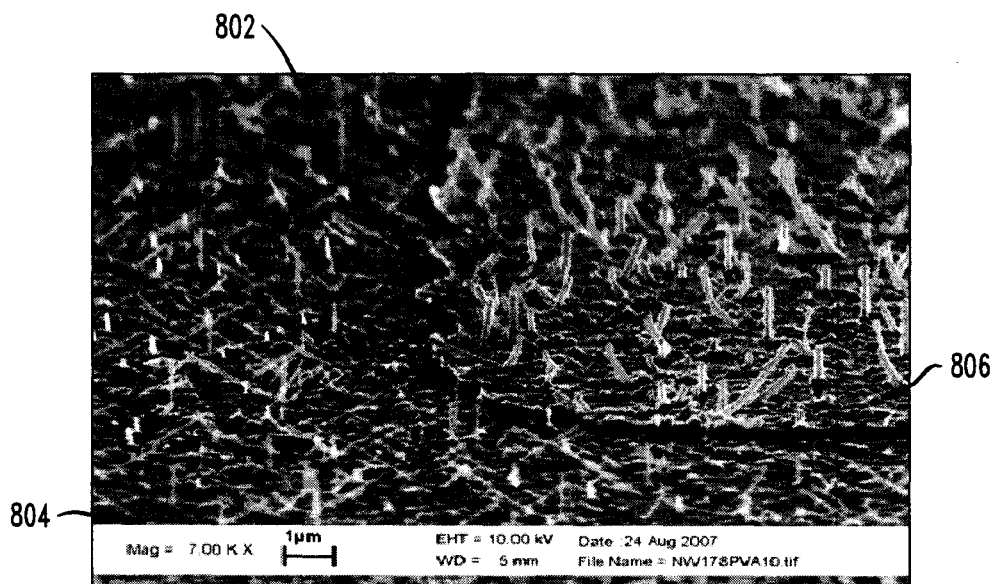
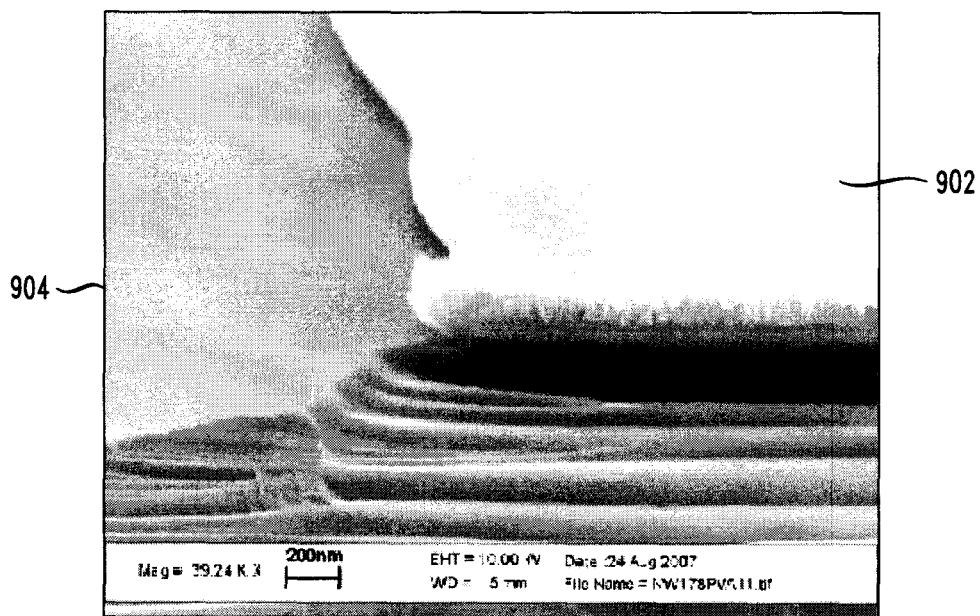
*FIG. 8*800*FIG. 9*900

FIG. 10

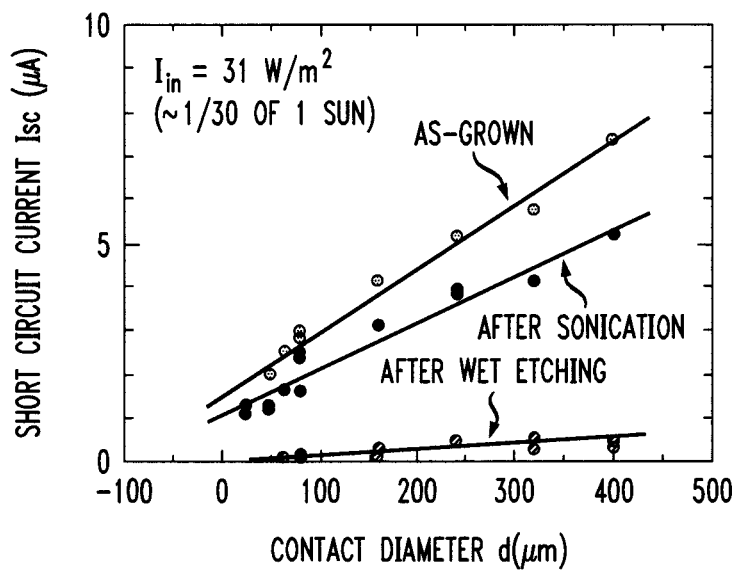
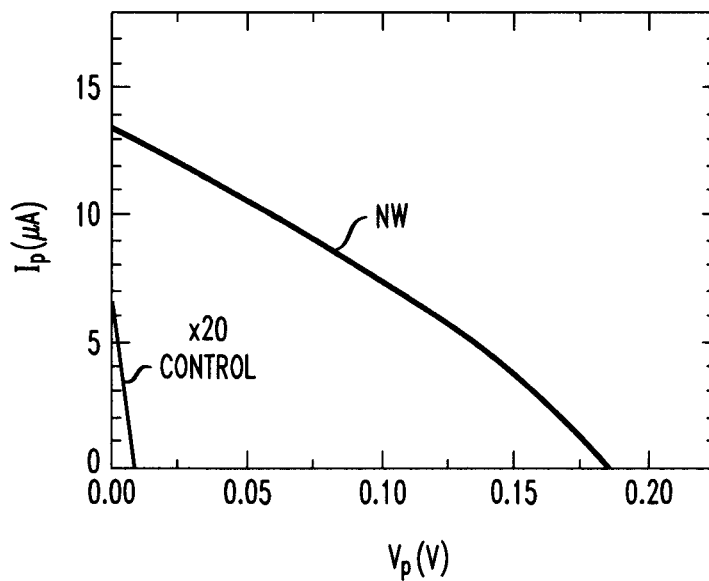
1000

FIG. 11

1100

1

TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCING EFFICIENCY OF PHOTOVOLTAIC DEVICES USING HIGH-ASPECT-RATIO NANOSTRUCTURES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/039,953, filed on Feb. 29, 2008, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,551,558, which is related to the commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/039,900, filed on Feb. 29, 2008 entitled "Photovoltaic Devices with Enhanced Efficiencies Using High-Aspect-Ratio Nanostructures," now U.S. Pat. No. 8,592,675, the contents of each of which are incorporated by reference herein.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to use of nanotechnology in photovoltaics, and more particularly, to the use of nanostructures to enhance photovoltaic device light absorption and efficiency.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Photovoltaic devices, such as photocells, are an important energy source that has thus far remained underutilized for widespread energy production. Photocells generate electrical energy by converting photons from a light source into electricity (e.g., by freeing electron-hole pairs). Conventional photocells, however, typically provide a light-to-electricity conversion efficiency of only up to about 25 percent. Such a low conversion efficiency makes conventional photocells an undesirable option for most applications.

Attempts have been made to increase photovoltaic device energy conversion efficiency using nanotechnology, by incorporating nanowires, nanocrystals, etc. into active layers of the device. See, for example, U.S. Patent Application No. 2005/0009224 filed by Yang et al., entitled "Nanowire Array and Nanowire Solar Cells and Methods for Forming the Same" (wherein nanowire oxides are used in conjunction with a charge transport medium in optoelectronic devices); U.S. Patent Application No. 2005/0214967 filed by Scher et al., entitled "Nanostructure and Nanocomposite Based Compositions and Photovoltaic Devices" (wherein nanostructures, such as core-shell nanocrystals, are used in photovoltaic devices oriented horizontally along an electrode plane) and Kayes et al., *Comparison of the Device Physics Principles of Planar and Radial p-n Junction Nanorod Solar Cells*, 97 J. APPL. PHYS. 114302 (2005) (wherein radial p-n junction nanorod solar cells are described).

Efficiency improvements are, however, still needed to make photovoltaics a viable and practical energy source.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides photovoltaic devices and techniques for enhancing the light-to-electricity conversion efficiency thereof. In one aspect of the invention, a photovoltaic device is provided. The photovoltaic device comprises a photocell having a photoactive layer and a non-photoactive layer adjacent to the photoactive layer so as to form a heterojunction between the photoactive layer and the non-photoactive layer; and a plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures on one or more surfaces of the photoactive layer. The plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures are configured to act as a

2

scattering media for incident light. The plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures can also be configured to create an optical resonance effect in the incident light. The photoactive layer can be doped with one of an n-type dopant or a p-type dopant and the non-photoactive layer can be doped with the other of the n-type dopant or the p-type dopant such that a p-n junction is formed between the photoactive layer and the non-photoactive layer.

In another aspect of the invention, a method of fabricating a photovoltaic device is provided. The method comprises the following steps. A photoactive layer is provided. A non-photoactive layer is formed over the photoactive layer so as to form a heterojunction between the photoactive layer and the non-photoactive layer. A plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures are formed on one or more surfaces of the photoactive layer. The plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures are configured to act as a scattering media for incident light.

A more complete understanding of the present invention, as well as further features and advantages of the present invention, will be obtained by reference to the following detailed description and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1A-D are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating an exemplary methodology for fabricating a photovoltaic device comprising a photocell having high-aspect-ratio nanostructures associated therewith according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary photovoltaic device comprising a thin-film semiconductor photocell with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures associated therewith according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary photovoltaic device having a Schottky junction-based photocell with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures associated therewith according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary photovoltaic device comprising a photocell formed from a combination of photoactive and non-photoactive layers, with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures associated therewith according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary photovoltaic device comprising a photocell with core/shell high-aspect-ratio nanostructures associated therewith according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary photovoltaic device comprising a photocell having a transparent electrode surrounded by a nanowire forest according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a graph illustrating enhanced performance of a Schottky junction-based photocell with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures having an n-type doped core and a p-type doped shell layer according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a scanning electron micrograph (SEM) image of a Schottky junction-based photocell having high-aspect-ratio nanostructures associated therewith according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is an SEM image of a Schottky junction-based photocell without high-aspect-ratio nanostructures according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 10 is a graph illustrating contact diameter versus short circuit photocurrent for several different Schottky junction-based photocell configurations according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 11 is a graph illustrating applied voltage to photocell versus photocell current for Schottky junction-based photocells both with and without high-aspect-ratio nanostructures according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIGS. 1A-D are cross-sectional diagrams illustrating an exemplary methodology for fabricating a photovoltaic device comprising a photocell having high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires, associated therewith. According to the present techniques, as will be described in detail below, the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures serve to enhance light absorption and thereby increase the light-to-electricity conversion efficiency of the present photovoltaic devices.

As shown in FIG. 1A, a first photoactive layer 102 is provided. The term “photoactive layer,” as used herein, refers to any device layer comprising a material that can absorb light energy and by way of that energy generate charge carriers (electron-hole pairs). Photoactive layer 102 can comprise a semiconductor material (such as one or more of silicon (Si), germanium (Ge), a group III-V element compound(s) and an organic material(s)) and/or a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a copper indium gallium selenide (CIGS) material(s)), and has a thickness of between about 20 micrometers (μm) and about 1,000 μm . According to an exemplary embodiment, photoactive layer 102 comprises a bulk Si (e.g., amorphous Si or polysilicon (poly-Si)) wafer that is doped with either an n-type or a p-type dopant. Suitable n-type dopants include, but are not limited to, phosphorous (P). Suitable p-type dopants include, but are not limited to, boron (B).

A second photoactive layer 104 is then formed, i.e., deposited or grown, over photoactive layer 102. Photoactive layer 104 acts as a charge collection layer of the device. Photoactive layer 104 can comprise a semiconductor material (such as one or more of Si, Ge, a group III-V element compound(s) and an organic material(s)), a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a CIGS material(s)), cadmium sulfide (CdS) and/or zinc oxide (ZnO). According to an exemplary embodiment, photoactive layer 104 comprises Si (amorphous Si or poly-Si) and is formed, i.e., grown, over photoactive layer 102 using a chemical vapor deposition (CVD) technique to a thickness of between about 20 angstroms (\AA) (i.e., $2 \times 10^{-3} \mu\text{m}$) and about 150 μm .

In general, each of the photovoltaic device configurations presented herein comprises a heterojunction formed between adjacent layers due to dissimilarities in material type (e.g., a Schottky junction, see description below) and/or doping type (e.g., a p-n junction). For example, photoactive layer 104 can be formed having an opposite polarity from photoactive layer 102, so as to form a p-n junction. Namely, if photoactive layer 102 comprises an n-type semiconductor, then photoactive layer 104 can be formed from a p-type semiconductor so as to form a p-n junction between photoactive layers 102 and 104. Conversely, if photoactive layer 102 comprises a p-type semiconductor, then photoactive layer 104 can be formed from an n-type semiconductor so as to form a p-n junction between photoactive layers 102 and 104. By way of example only, an n-type or p-type dopant(s) can be introduced during CVD growth of photoactive layer 104 by way of dopant precursors such as phosphine (PH_3) (an n-type dopant precursor) or diborane (B_2H_6) (a p-type dopant precursor). Alternatively, high temperature diffusion from a dopant source can be used to introduce an n-type or p-type dopant(s) into photoactive layer 104. As such, a photocell is formed having a p-n junction,

i.e., between photoactive layer 102 and photoactive layer 104, serving to separate photogenerated charge carriers (electron-hole pairs) in each of photoactive layer 102 and photoactive layer 104.

The photocell configuration shown in FIG. 1A is merely exemplary, and any other suitable photocell configuration can be employed in accordance with the present teachings. Namely, any photocell configuration wherein an arrangement of junctions allows the generated electron-hole pairs to be separated to provide a useful current can be employed. For example, the photocell can comprise a thin-film semiconductor photocell. An exemplary thin-film semiconductor photocell is shown in FIG. 2 (described below). The photocell may also comprise a Schottky junction. An exemplary Schottky junction-based photocell is shown in FIG. 3 (described below). The photocell may further comprise a p-n junction formed from a combination of photoactive and non-photoactive layers. An exemplary photocell having photoactive and non-photoactive layers is shown in FIG. 4 (described below).

High-aspect-ratio nanostructures, such as nanowires, microcolumns and/or nanotubes, are then formed on one more surfaces of the photocell. The term “high-aspect-ratio nanostructures,” as used herein, refers generally to any rod-like structures having a diameter of between about five nanometers (nm) and about 200 nm, and a length of between about 0.1 μm and about 100 μm , e.g., between about three μm and about 30 μm .

The high-aspect-ratio nanostructures enhance light absorption by the photocell, and thereby increase the light-to-electricity conversion efficiency of the photovoltaic device. Namely, high-aspect-ratio nanostructures having the above dimensions can be employed with a spacing between adjacent nanostructures of between about 100 nm and about three μm . This spacing of between about 100 nm and about three μm is comparable to, or a few times, the wavelength(s) of visible incident light, which is typically between about 0.4 μm and about one μm . As such, the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures can act as a good scattering media for the incident light. The incident light thus becomes localized on those surfaces of the photocell having the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, thereby enhancing light absorption by the photocell.

The high-aspect-ratio nanostructures can also enhance light absorption by acting as “antennae” for incident light. Namely, the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures can create an optical resonance effect in the incident light that provides a more effective coupling between electromagnetic fields of the incident light and the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures. As such, the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures are formed primarily on the light-absorbing surfaces of the photocell.

FIGS. 1B-C illustrate the formation of Si nanowires on a top, light-absorbing surface of the photocell, i.e., on photoactive layer 104. These techniques as well as any other techniques suitable for forming high-aspect-ratio nanostructures on any of the photocell configurations described above, such as etching, may be used in accordance with the present teachings. For a description of microcolumns and techniques for the formation thereof, see for example, Guha et al. “Selective area metalorganic molecular-beam epitaxy of GaN and the growth of luminescent microcolumns on Si/SiO₂,” Appl. Phys. Lett. 75, 463 (2007), the contents of which is incorporated by reference herein.

As shown in FIG. 1B, a catalyst layer 106 is deposited over a side of photoactive layer 104 opposite photoactive layer 102. According to an exemplary embodiment, catalyst layer 106 comprises gold (Au) and is deposited over photoactive layer 104 by evaporation to a thickness of about 30 \AA . Fol-

lowing deposition of the catalyst layer, the photocell is inserted into a CVD system and, as shown in FIG. 1C, Si nanowires are grown, e.g., by a vapor-liquid-solid (VLS)-CVD technique. For a detailed description of nanowire formation, see, for example, U.S. application Ser. No. 11/494, 195, entitled "Techniques for Use of Nanotechnology in Photovoltaics," filed on Jul. 27, 2006, the contents of which is incorporated by reference herein. While the formation of Si nanowires is described, it is to be understood that the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures may comprise any material that can act as a scatterer and/or an absorber of light, such as one or more of a semiconductor material (e.g., Si, Ge or silicon-germanium (SiGe)), a dielectric material and a metal.

Optionally, an n-type and/or a p-type doping agent may be introduced during nanowire growth, resulting in n-type and/or p-type doped nanowires. Suitable doping agents include, but are not limited to, B_2H_6 and PH_3 . By way of example only, if the photocell is exposed to an ambient of silane (SiH_4) and B_2H_6 , boron-doped (B-doped), p-type Si nanowire growth will result. Similarly, if the photocell is exposed to an ambient of SiH_4 and PH_3 , phosphorous-doped (P-doped), n-type Si nanowire growth will result.

Additionally, a shell layer can be formed around one or more of the nanowires. When this configuration is employed, it is preferable that the shell layer have a different polarity and/or different dopant concentration from the nanowire(s). The formation of a shell layer is described in detail, for example, in conjunction with the description of FIG. 5, below.

As shown in FIG. 1C, a plurality of nanowires **108**, referred to herein collectively as a "nanowire forest," are formed on a top surface of photoactive layer **104**. The configuration of nanowires **108** shown in FIG. 1C is representative of a non-random placement pattern, wherein the nanowires are evenly spaced from one another and aligned in a specific direction (in this case perpendicular to photoactive layer **104**). Alternatively, a random placement pattern (not shown), wherein the nanowires are variably spaced from one another and project from the surface of photoactive layer **104** at a variety of different angles can also be employed.

A non-random placement pattern (also called a "regular arrangement") can be obtained by patterning the catalyst layer (see FIG. 1B), e.g., using electron-beam lithography, to form an array of islands prior to the VLS-CVD growth. A random placement pattern can be obtained by annealing the catalyst layer at a temperature of about 500 degrees Celsius ($^{\circ}C$.) prior to the VLS-CVD growth.

Due to the presence of the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, an increased amount of incident light is absorbed by photoactive layers **102** and **104** as compared to similar devices without the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures. See, for example, FIG. 9 (described below). This enhanced efficiency permits thinner photoactive layers to be used in the present photocells. Reducing the thicknesses of the photoactive layers can improve absorption of shorter wavelengths of light.

As shown in FIG. 1D, a transparent electrode **110** is formed over, i.e., covering, the nanowire forest. According to an exemplary embodiment, transparent electrode **110** comprises indium-tin-oxide (ITO) and is deposited over the nanowire forest using a sputter deposition technique. Transparent electrode **110** serves as an electrical contact to the photocell. Other electrical contact configurations are, however, possible. By way of example only, instead of using an electrode over the entire nanowire forest, one or more smaller electrodes may be formed on the photoactive layer so as to be surrounded by the nanowire forest. This configuration is shown, for example, in FIG. 6 (described below).

FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating exemplary photovoltaic device **200** comprising thin-film semiconductor photocell **202** with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires **204**, associated therewith. Namely, thin-film semiconductor photocell **202** comprises arbitrary substrate **206**, first photoactive layer **208** adjacent to substrate **206** and second photoactive layer **210** adjacent to a side of photoactive layer **208** opposite substrate **206**. According to an exemplary embodiment, substrate **206** comprises a glass, a metal and/or a plastic substrate, photoactive layer **208** comprises a semiconductor material (such as one or more of Si, Ge, a group III-V element compound(s) and an organic material(s)) and/or a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a CIGS material(s)) and photoactive layer **210** comprises a semiconductor material (such as one or more of Si, Ge, a group III-V element compound(s), an organic material(s)), a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a CIGS material(s)), CdS and/or ZnO. Each of photoactive layers **208** and **210** can have a thickness of between about one nm and about 100 nm. Nanowires **204** collectively form a nanowire forest over photoactive layer **210**.

FIG. 3 is a diagram illustrating exemplary photovoltaic device **300** comprising Schottky junction-based photocell **302** with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires **304**, associated therewith. Namely, photocell **302** comprises photoactive layer **306** and metal layer **308** adjacent to, i.e., over at least a portion of, photoactive layer **306** so as to form a Schottky junction between photoactive layer **306** and metal layer **308**. Nanowires **304** collectively form a nanowire forest over photoactive layer **306**. Metal layer **308** can be deposited over photoactive layer **306** so as to cover some of the nanowires. Photoactive layer **306** can comprise a semiconductor material (such as one or more of Si, Ge, a group III-V element compound(s) and an organic material(s)) and/or a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a CIGS material(s)). According to an exemplary embodiment, photoactive layer **306** comprises an n-type semiconductor (e.g., Si doped with an n-type dopant) and metal layer **308** comprises one or more of nickel (Ni), palladium (Pd) and Au and is deposited over photoactive layer **306** using an evaporation technique to a thickness of between about 10 nm and about 150 nm.

During operation, nanowires **304** aid in capturing and absorbing incident light (arrows **310**) and generating charge carriers (electron-hole pairs), i.e., electrons **312** and holes **314**, which can be transported to electrical leads **316** and **318**, respectively. It is further notable that the nanowires under the metal layer can also serve to capture and absorb the incident light if the metal layer surrounding these nanowires is thin enough to pass the light.

FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating exemplary photovoltaic device **400** comprising photocell **402** with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires **404**, associated therewith. Photocell **402** is formed from a combination of photoactive and non-photoactive layers. Namely, photoactive layer **406** is present adjacent to non-photoactive layer **408**. According to an exemplary embodiment, photoactive layer **406** has an opposite polarity from non-photoactive layer **408**. Namely, if photoactive layer **406** is doped with an n-type dopant, then non-photoactive layer **408** is doped with a p-type dopant. Similarly, if photoactive layer **406** is doped with a p-type dopant, then non-photoactive layer **408** is doped with an n-type dopant. As a result, a p-n junction is formed between photoactive layer **406** and non-photoactive layer **408**. Nanowires **404** collectively form a nanowire forest over photoactive layer **406** and serve to scatter incident light. The incident light is absorbed both by nanowires **404** and by

photoactive layer **406**. As a result, electron-hole pairs are generated and the charge carriers transported to the p-n junction.

Alternatively, non-photoactive layer **408** can comprise a metal layer, thus forming a Schottky junction with photoactive layer **406**. See also, FIG. 5 (described below).

FIG. 5 is a diagram illustrating exemplary photovoltaic device **500** comprising photocell **502** with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires **505**, associated therewith. Namely, photovoltaic device **500** comprises substrate **504**, metal layer **506** adjacent to substrate **504** and photoactive layer **508** adjacent to a side of metal layer **506** opposite substrate **504**. According to an exemplary embodiment, substrate **504** comprises a glass, a metal and/or a plastic substrate. Metal layer **506** forms a Schottky junction with photoactive layer **508**.

Photoactive layer **508**, e.g., a conformal layer of semiconductor, is formed during the nanowire growth process and can have a thickness of between about one nm and about 100 nm. Thus, nanowires **505** are continuous with photoactive layer **508**. A shell layer **510** is present over nanowires **505**/photoactive layer **508**. It is preferable that shell layer **510** has a different polarity and/or different dopant concentration from nanowires **505**. For example, a p-type doped shell layer would be used in combination with n-type doped nanowires, and vice-a-versa. According to this configuration, a high-aspect-ratio nanostructure around which a shell layer is formed is referred to as a "nanostructure core."

The shell layer can be formed in a manner similar to the high-aspect-ratio nanostructures. Namely, once the nanostructure cores are formed, a conformal layer is grown that wraps around each core. This conformal "shell" layer is grown with the addition of a dopant of different polarity and/or concentration from the core. In this fashion, the shell layer created is different from the core. As will be described, for example, in conjunction with the description of FIG. 7, below, employing a nanostructure core/shell configuration, as described herein, can further enhance the light absorption of a photocell, as compared to the use of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures alone.

Transparent electrode **512** is present over the nanowires/shell layer. According to an exemplary embodiment, transparent electrode **512** comprises ITO and/or doped ZnO. Filler material **514** may be present in spaces between the transparent electrode and the nanowires/shell layer.

During operation of photovoltaic device **500**, the nanowires/shell layer serve to scatter incident light. The incident light is absorbed by both the nanowires/shell layer and photoactive layer **508**. As a result, electron-hole pairs are generated and charge carriers are transported to the Schottky junction.

FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating exemplary photovoltaic device **600** comprising photocell **602** with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires **604**, associated therewith. Namely, photocell **602** comprises first photoactive layer **606** and second photoactive layer **608** adjacent to photoactive layer **606**. According to an exemplary embodiment, photoactive layer **606** comprises a semiconductor material (such as one or more of Si, Ge, a group III-V element compound(s) and an organic material(s)) and/or a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a CIGS material(s)) and photoactive layer **608** comprises a semiconductor material (such as one or more of Si, Ge, a group III-V element compound(s), an organic material(s)), a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure (such as a CIGS material(s)), CdS and/or ZnO. Nanowires **604** collectively form a nanowire forest over photoactive layer **608**. Electrode **610** is

present on photoactive layer **608** so as to be surrounded by the nanowire forest. Namely, as compared to electrode **110** described, for example, in conjunction with the description of FIG. 1D, above, electrode **610** covers only some of the nanowires, leaving the remainder of the nanowire forest to surround the electrode **610**. According to one embodiment, electrode **610** comprises ITO and is transparent. Multiple electrodes **610** may be present on photoactive layer **608** and surrounded by the nanowire forest.

FIG. 7 is a graph **700** illustrating enhanced performance of a Schottky junction-based photocell with high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires, having an n-doped core and a p-doped shell. Namely, graph **700** illustrates contact diameter d (measured in μm) versus short circuit photocurrent I_{SC} (measured in microamps (μA)) for a Schottky junction-based photocell with n-doped nanowires (labeled "n-NW"), a Schottky junction-based photocell with nanowires having an n-doped core and a p-doped shell (labeled "n-NW+p-shell") and a Schottky junction-based photocell without nanowires (labeled "control (no NW)"). Illumination I_m was 80 milliwatts per square centimeter (mW/cm^2) (i.e., about 0.8 suns). As such, the data presented in graph **700** clearly demonstrates the enhancement of the photocurrent due to the presence of the nanowires, and especially to the presence of nanowires having an n-doped core and a p-doped shell.

EXAMPLE

The present techniques are further described by way of reference to the following non-limiting example:

A Schottky junction-based nanowire photocell: an n-doped Si substrate was coated with a three millimeter (mm) thick layer of Au by thermal evaporation of Au. The wafer was then inserted into a CVD chamber and heated to 550°C . under 200 standard cubic centimeters per minute (sccm) of hydrogen (H_2) gas flow. As a result, the Au forms small islands on the surface of the Si substrate which allows for the preferential nucleation of Si nanowires when a 50 sccm SiH_4 gas flow is initiated into the CVD chamber in the presence of 50 sccm of PH_3 serving as a doping precursor (i.e., that later will be transformed to be the dopant during the nanowire growth). Nanowires were then grown by VLS-CVD. After nanowire growth, any remnants of the Au were removed using an iodine-based etchant type TFA (manufactured by the Transene Company, Danvers, Mass.). A native silicon dioxide (SiO_2) layer (an unwanted by-product of the growth process which typically forms by natural oxidation on exposure to ambient air) was then removed by buffered oxide etching (BOE). Circular contacts with diameters d of between about $50\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ and about $400\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ were then fabricated on the nanowire-covered substrate by depositing a 130 nm thick layer of Ni by evaporation. A scanning electron micrograph (SEM) image of the resulting structure is shown in FIG. 8.

FIG. 8 is SEM image **800** of a Schottky junction-based photocell having high-aspect-ratio nanostructures, i.e., nanowires **802**, associated therewith. As can be seen from image **800**, nanowires **802** are present on the surfaces of substrate **804** and covered by Ni contact **806** (visible in the right half of the image).

A control sample (i.e., a Schottky junction-based photocell) was also used which was inserted into the CVD chamber along with the nanowire sample, except that the control sample did not contain the Au nucleation layer. As a result no nanowires grew on the control sample. Ni contacts were deposited on the control sample in exactly the same fashion. An image of the control sample is shown in FIG. 9.

FIG. 9 is SEM image 900 of a Schottky junction-based photocell. The Schottky junction-based photocell comprises Ni contact 902 over n-doped Si substrate 904. As can be seen from image 900, since the Au nucleation layer was not present, no nanowires grew in this control sample.

Both of the Schottky junction-based photocells described in conjunction with the description of FIGS. 8 and 9, above, i.e., one with nanowires and one without nanowires, respectively, were measured for photovoltaic performance, and a clear enhancement in photocurrent was observed for the photocell that had the nanowires associated therewith. The photocurrent observed was a combination of current measured due to electron-hole generation underneath the electrode, as well as the electron-hole generation in the area surrounding the Ni contact and within a capture cross-section (i.e., an area where photo-generated carriers can be effectively collected). A dimension of this capture cross-section will typically be of the order of a minority carrier diffusion length (i.e., an average length minority carriers travel before they are lost to recombination).

FIG. 10 is a graph 1000 illustrating contact diameter d (measured in μm) versus short circuit photocurrent I_{SC} (measured in μA) for several different Schottky junction-based photocell configurations. Namely, as shown in graph 1000, a comparison was made of the I_{SC} for the following cases, all being variations of the Schottky junction-based photocell of FIG. 8. In the first case, the I_{SC} was measured in the Schottky junction-based photocell of FIG. 8 having nanowires associated therewith (described above) (labeled "as-grown"). In the second case, sonication was used to remove some of the nanowires from the photocell (labeled "after sonication") and the Schottky junction-based photocell, now with a portion of the nanowires removed, was again measured. Note the significant drop in the I_{SC} which demonstrates the contribution of the nanowires to the photocurrent. In the third case, the n-doped Si substrate was etched down using tetramethylammonium hydroxide (TMAH) at 85°C . for five minutes to remove all remaining nanowires from the photocell (labeled "after wet etching"). The Schottky junction-based photocell, now subject to the etching, was again measured and the results show a further depression of the I_{SC} . $I_{m, 30}$ was 30 Watts per square meter (W/m^2) (i.e., about $1/30$ of one sun). As such, the data presented in graph 1000 clearly demonstrates the enhancement of the photocurrent due to the presence of the nanowires.

FIG. 11 is a graph 1100 illustrating applied voltage to photocell V_p , (measured in volts (V)) versus photocell current I_m (measured in μA) for two different Schottky junction-based photocell configurations under an of about $30\text{ W}/\text{m}^2$. Namely, FIG. 11 shows a comparison of the photocurrent for the Schottky junction-based photocell sample of FIG. 8 having nanowires associated therewith (labeled "NW") and for the Schottky junction-based photocell control sample of FIG. 9 without nanowires (labeled "control") (both described above). Again, a vast difference in photocurrent between the two samples is observed.

Although illustrative embodiments of the present invention have been described herein, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to those precise embodiments, and that various other changes and modifications may be made by one skilled in the art without departing from the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A photovoltaic device comprising:

a photocell having i) a photoactive layer, ii) a plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures on one or more surfaces of the photoactive layer configured to act as a scattering media for incident light, wherein the plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures includes a first group of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures and a second group of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures iii) a metal layer on, and in direct contact with, the photoactive layer, and iv) electrical leads to directly contacting the metal layer and the photoactive layer,

wherein a Schottky junction is formed between the metal layer and the photoactive layer, and wherein the metal layer is formed directly on a portion of the photoactive layer with the metal layer completely covering the first group of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures and leaves the second group of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures completely uncovered the first group of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures and leaves the second group of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures by the metal layer and thus free to aid in capturing and absorbing incident light and to generate charge carrier electron-hole pairs that can be transported to the electrical leads.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein the plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures are further configured to create an optical resonance effect in the incident light.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein the photoactive layer comprises one or more of silicon, germanium, a group III-V element compound and an organic material.

4. The device of claim 1, wherein the photoactive layer comprises a photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure.

5. The device of claim 4, wherein the photoactive material with a chalcogenide crystal structure comprises a copper indium gallium selenide material.

6. The device of claim 1, wherein each high-aspect-ratio nanostructure has a diameter of between about five nanometers and about 200 nanometers.

7. The device of claim 1, wherein each high-aspect-ratio nanostructure has a length of between about 0.1 micrometers and about 100 micrometers.

8. The device of claim 1, wherein the plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures comprises one or more of nanowires, microcolumns having nanoscale dimensions, and nanotubes.

9. The device of claim 1, wherein the plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures comprises a nanowire forest.

10. The device of claim 1, wherein each high-aspect-ratio nanostructure comprises one or more of a semiconductor material, a dielectric material and a metal.

11. The device of claim 1, wherein the plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures have a spacing between adjacent nanostructures of between about 100 nanometers and about three micrometers.

12. The device of claim 1, wherein the metal layer is configured to be thin enough such that light can pass through thus enabling the plurality of high-aspect-ratio nanostructures covered by the metal layer to also aid in capturing and absorbing the incident light.

13. The device of claim 1, wherein the photoactive layer comprises a single layer of a photoactive material.

* * * * *